DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 339 538 PS 020 162

AUTHOR Renwick, Margery, Comp.
TITLE Parents as Partners: Parents as Educators.
INSTITUTION New Zealand Council for Educational Research, Wellington.
REPORT NO ISBN-0-908916-14-0
PUB DATE 91
NOTE 68p.; Papers presented at the Invitational Seminar of the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (NZCER) (Wellington, New Zealand, 1991).
PUB TYPE Collected Works - Conference Proceedings (021)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Early Experience; Foreign Countries; Mathematics Instruction; Parent Education; *Parenting Skills; *Parent Participation; *Parent Role; *Parents as Teachers; Parent School Relationship; *Preschool Education
IDENTIFIERS Maori (Language); Maori (People); *New Zealand; New Zealand Council for Educational Research

ABSTRACT

An invitational seminar, which was sponsored in March 1991, by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research, focused on research on the role of parents in early childhood education. Papers presented covered: (1) the preprimary project, a study of children's experiences prior to formal schooling (C. Garden); (2) the role of the state versus the role of parents in early childhood education (P. Kennedy); (3) three studies of the role of parents as teachers (S. McNaughton); (4) a government project for parent support and education (J. Gerritsen); (5) the Maori Women's Welfare League and its parenting programs (A. Reriti-Crofts); (6) the Te Kohanga Reo Trust, which aims at fostering the use of the Maori language among Maori young people (I. Twhiwhirangi); (7) general condsiderations on parent education in New Zealand (B. McMillan); and (8) a home-based intervention project to help parents support their children's mathematical development (J. Young-Loveridge). A reference list or bibliography is appended to some of the papers. A letter summarizing the major themes of the seminar is included. (BC)

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Parents as Partners: Parents as Educators

Papers Presented at the 1991 NZCER Invitational Seminar

Compiled by Margery Renwick

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Compiled by Margery Renwick

New Zealand Council for Educational Research
Wellington
1991

New Zealand Council for Educational Research
P.O. Box 3237
Wellington
New Zealand

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ISBN 0-908916-14-0

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BACKGROUND

The idea for this invitational seminar on Parents as Partners: Parents as Educators arose out of a meeting of the NZCER Advisory Committee for Families and Early Childhood. The Advisory Committee meets twice a year to discuss the work of the Council and to raise issues in early childhood which they consider should be the basis for research studies, or inform the dissemination of research.

The seminar was organized with the government initiatives on the role of parents in early childhood education in mind. It was hoped that the seminar would provide an opportunity for participants to focus on research in the area, both from New Zealand and overseas. The role of parents in early childhood in New Zealand would also be considered in an international context.

The form of the seminar was a series of presentations followed by a panel discussion to highlight and bring together issues considered to be in need of further consideration. At the meeting of the Advisory Committee which was held the next day, it was decided that it would be helpful if a letter summarizing the main issues raised at the seminar should be sent to selected Ministers.

THIS REPORT

This report includes the presentations made at the seminar. It also includes a copy of the letter sent to the Ministers which summarizes the panel discussion.

PARENTS AS PARTNERS: PARENTS AS EDUCATORS
FAMILIES AND EARLY CHILDHOOD SEMINAR

PROGRAMME

9:30 a.m.	PRESENTATIONS
9:45	Carol Garden: IEA Pre-Primary Project
10:15	Pam Kennedy: State Intervention versus Parent Power
CHAIR:	Val Podmore
10:45	COFFEE
11:00	Stuart McNaughton: Parents as Teachers: Validated or Educated?
11:45	Jan Gerritsen: The Parent Support and Education Project
CHAIR:	Margery Renwick
12:15	LUNCH
1:15	Aroha Reriti-Crofts: Maori Womens Welfare League Iritana Tawhiwhirangi: Kohanga Reo Trust
2:15	Bruce McMillan: Some Critical Reflections on Parent Education (Paper presented on his behalf) Jenny Young-Loveridge: Helping Parents to Support Their Children's Mathematical Development
CHAIR:	Anne Meade
3:00	PLENARY SESSION: Discussion and Conclusion
CHAIR:	Cathy Wylie
6:30	Informal Meal at the Settlement

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NZCER STAFF

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Carol Garden Ministry of Education
Helen May Hamilton Teachers College
Anne Meade Victoria University (Chairperson)
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THE IEA PRE-PRIMARY PROJECT

Carol Garden
Ministry of Education

BACKGROUND

IEA is the acronym of the International Association for the Evaluation for Educational Achievement, a non-governmental, non-profit making organization of research institutions in 45 countries that is well known for its 25 years of comparative international surveys in such academic areas as science, maths, computer education, and written composition.

IEA research projects have been instrumental in demonstrating the feasibility of large-scale cross-national empirical studies and advancing the methodology of comparative education.

New Zealand is not participating in the present preprimary project but has over the past few years taken part in the second maths project, written composition project, computer education, and the literacy project.

The IEA Preprimary Project

The IEA Preprimary Project is an ongoing international study investigating the nature, quality and effects of the experience of children prior to formal schooling.

Suggested topics as areas of study for national profiles for each country in this project are:

1. the history of early childhood care and education services
2. demographics
3. national child and family policies
4. early childhood care and educatin arrangements currently in use
5. research in early childhood care and education
6. issues of the next decade

The IEA Preprimary Project was conceived during the late 1970s by a small group of educational researchers associated with IEA.

In 1982 the IEA General Assembly approved a draft proposal for the Preprimary Project and member countries received general information about the project and were invited to take part. During the next few years consideration of research baseds for each country, the development of assessment methodology and the location of sources of funding for each country and for

co-ordinating the international activities were undertaken.

In 1986 the international co-ordinating centre for the project was established at High/Scope in the USA.

The Preprimary Project consists of three inter-related phases. *Phase 1* (now completed) employed house survey techniques to gather information from families about their use of early childhood care and eduation services. Fourteen countries took part - Belgium, Germany, Finland, Hong Kong, Hungary, Italy, Kenya, Nigeria, China, the Phillipines, Portugal, Spain, Thailand, and the USA.

Phase 2 has two parts. The first part selects a sample of service settings identified in Phase 1 and uses observations and interview questionnaires to investigate the quality of life for young children in these various settings. The second part is the selection of a small number of children from each setting and assessing their development in several areas.

Phase 3 involves a follow-up study of age-seven children assessed in phase 2.

This final phase gathers information about the children's development since their preprimary experience using various methods, including direct assessment, school records, and information from parents and researchers.

Summary of the Preprimary Project

Lilian Katz, a leading figure in early childhood education, played a major role in the planning of the Preprimary Project. She has provided an excellent summary of some of the key findings of Phase 1 of the project and these have been presented as an afterword in the publication *How Nations Serve Young Children* edited by Patricia Olmstead and David Weikart, which is a full report on phase 1 of the project.

Lilian Katz's summary sets out the profiles of childcare and education in the 14 countries taking part in Phase 1 and notes several key points that emerge from the results:

a) The increasing numbers of parnets who are employed in environments in which the presence of their young children is neither desirable nor practical.

b) The slow but steady improvement in child health - once basic survival risks have been addressed within a society, issues concerning children's quality of life in general and their care and education in particular begin to command attention.

c) The growing conviction by educators and the wider community that experience in the early years may have significant if not irreversible effects on children's

subsequent development, including their responsiveness to schooling.

Lilian Katz also notes that there seems to be more agreement about lasting damage from early negative experiences than about lasting benefits from early positive experiences. The expansion or improvement of preprimary services, however, seem to be on many a national agenda.

The descriptions of early childhood care and education provision present a surprisingly consistent picture across countries, with countries identifying still much to be done to fully meet the needs of their young children. For example, deficits in service availability; co-ordination between early childhood agencies; and quality of personnel are recurring themes.

Lilian Katz concludes that the field of preprimary education is bound to gain knowledge nad insights not obtainable solely from experience within each country's borders and that there is much to be learnt from others.

While many outcomes from the IEA preprimary study can be recognized as similar across all countries and also similar to our own country, a closer look shows that each country has its own unique features that distinguish it from other countries.

Let us for a moment reflect on what it is that makes our early childhood services uniquely New Zealand services and different from many other countries.

NEW ZEALAND'S UNIQUE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION SERVICES

New Zealand is an island community which, while still largely an agricultural nation, is moving rapidly towards becoming an international trading nation.

New Zealanders are an outdoor people, physically active and used to an environment of open spaces, high mountains, sea, and strong sunlight and wind. In the last 100 years we have not experienced the devastation of invasion and war, or of famine and plagues.

Our ancestors and forefathers came to New Zealand for a better life for themselves and their families and we have grown into a resourceful, independent people not bound by class structures and used to doing things for ourselves.

The development of our early childhood education services in part reflects this. We have established a wide range of early childhood care and education services. A few have been initiated by the state but the majority have been initiated by parents and communities who have decided what type of service best suited their needs, and if it has not been available,

have gone ahead and set it up for themselves.

While early childhood services in New Zealand differ in structure and type of programme offered, they each reflect a certain common early childhood education philosophy that is uniquely home grown. Using an international perspective, we can identify several factors that have helped to shape New Zealand early childhood education services as uniquely our own.

1. *Our family-oriented philosophy*

Our early childhood services are strongly family-oriented rather than strongly child-oriented.

This is reflected in the large number of 'family-initiated' services in the community, and also in early childhood education training programmes, which provide both training opportunities for parents to become more effective parents and early childhood teacher-training programmes that train staff to meet the needs of both children and parents.

2. *Our family-environment philosophy*

A family-enrichment philosophy is based on a positive model of early childhood education, whereby programmes are seen as being an extension to the range of activities available in the home. Our services complement the home environment and provide an enrichment of experiences and learning opportunities that will enable young children to develop to their fullest potential.

This is counter to the deficit model of education whereby programmes are seen as being necessary to make up for some deficiencies in the children's environment.

3. *Our use of outdoor space and natural materials*

As New Zealanders we prize highly our easy access to the sea and mountains and sports fields. Our children are encouraged to play outdoors. Our early childhood centres all have ample space for sand and water play, for freely running on grass, and for circle and ball games.

The use of wood is very common in New Zealand. We build our houses with it and edge our gardens with it. We take great pride in our large wooden outdoor climbing constructions and in our amply stocked block corners with their range of wooden toy accessories.

The wide use of outdoor space and of natural materials such as wood and sand are features not common to many countries overseas where there is little space for running, where natural materials are a scarce and expensive commodity, and where children learn to walk quietly and carefully to avoid unnecessary jostling on crowded sidewalks and learn to play

for long periods of time seated indoors at tables in groups, playing quietly with brightly coloured plastic manipulative equipment.

Our country and our heritage has helped to shape our early childhood education services.

4. *Partnership between parents and the state*

One most important and unique feature of New Zealand early childhood education services is the degree of partnership that exists between the Government, parents, and communities.

Successive governments have provided financial support and professional guidance to support early childhood services that have been based on emerging community needs and established by voluntary parent and community initiatives.

A key principle of early childhood education in New Zealand is the acknowledgement that parents are the first and prime educators of their children.

Parents have initiated the establishment of most New Zealand early childhood services. They have owned them and managed them; they have cleaned and cared for them; they have trained to work in them, after first establishing the training programmes.

Our two uniquely home-grown early childhood services, playcentres and kohanga reo, have received acclaim, both here and overseas, as models of education services that meet the needs of both children and their families.

New Zealand is not taking part in the IEA Preprimary Project, but we can benefit from study of the results of the project and critically look at our own services rejoice in our strengths, and give attention to making improvements and filling gaps where these are identified.

Early childhood education in New Zealand is based on respect for the family and its strenths; on the reinforcement of both the family's and the community's role in the children's development; and the partnership between parents, service providers, and the state.

I like to think it will continue to develop within this partnership framework which has served us well up to now.

STATE INTERVENTION VERSUS PARENT POWER

Pam Kennedy
Early Childhood Development Unit

Tena koutou katoa. Nga mihi nui ki a koutou. Nga mihi nui te whanau o Nga Kaitaunaki Kohungahunga. Nga mihi nui Te Roopo Maatua Taukoko. Kia tau te rangimarie ki a tatou katoa. Tena koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou katoa.

The theme of today's seminar is parents as partners, parents as educators. Early childhood education in New Zealand has been predicated on this belief at least since the establishment of the Playcentre movement in the 1940s. Community childcare centres also involve parents as both users and providers and the whanau concept of Te Kohanga Reo has as part of its aim a shared responsibility for the protection, use and growth of the Maori language with parents as both learners and educators.

Pacific Island Language Groups and playgroups, to be exempt from licensing standards, need to have more than half the parents of the children attending each session present and the group of parents assuming responsibility for each child attending the group.

The other important aspects of early childhood in New Zealand that have "assisted" the view of parents as partners and educators are its non-compulsory nature and the fact that early childhood services have largely been developed by parents or communities to meet their own needs.

The State is not a provider of early childhood services in New Zealand except for the remaining 31 Preschool Classes in Primary Schools and they currently have the option of becoming another type of early childhood service. The funding has, therefore, also been a partnership and, while funding levels have pushed the voluntary input, mainly of women, to its limit, they have also ensured that at least some responsibility and power has remained with early childhood organizations and parents and there is consequently a diversity and choice in early childhood that is not present in our school system.

I would like to leave early childhood centre provisions to one side and consider what level or type of intervention by the state in parenting might be appropriate if parents are seen as educators and also as having the power or the right to make choices about the education of their children - outside or before involvement in e.g. childcare centres, kindergartens and playcentres, te kohanga reo and Pacific Island language groups.

I will attempt to provide some frameworks, gleaned from international literature and research on what is called Parent Support, as a context that any State intervention in parenting can be considered within.

Any person or organization who works with parents operates from some perspective, with some model in mind - whether they are conscious of it or not and research offers a framework for considering key issues such as the following:

1. Problem and solution responsibilities;
2. Aims of intervention - by content or as a continuum;
3. Relationship between deliverer of "support" and recipient parents;
4. Recipe or diversity in service delivery;
5. Who is accountable to whom?
6. How parents or recipients are viewed by the intervention or intervenors.
7. What and how to evaluate?

ISSUE 1 PROBLEM & SOLUTION RESPONSIBILITIES

Brickman et al (1982) say that there are four fundamentally different orientations to the world contained in four models of helping and coping embodied in all helpers or intervenors, recipients and the institutions they come into contact with.

They argue that whether or not people are held responsible for causing their problems and whether or not they are held responsible for solving these problems are the factors determining this orientation and the following four models.

1. The Moral Model in which people are attributed responsibility for both creating and solving (often by exercising willpower) their problems. Helping is most often by exhortation to greater effort.

2. The Compensatory Model in which people are not blamed for their problems but are held responsible for solving them. People are seen as having to compensate for handicaps or obstacles imposed on them, often with help or training to be more assertive and deal more effectively with their environment.

3. The Medical Model in which people are not held responsible for either the problem or the solution but are seen as ill or incapacitated and needing experts to provide service or treatment.

4. The Enlightenment Model in which people are blamed for causing their problems but not seen as responsible for solving them. The emphasis is on enlightening people as to the true nature of their problem and the course of action needed to deal with it.

The hypothesis suggested and argued is that the models in which people are held responsible for solutions (the compensatory and moral models) are more likely to increase people's competence than models in which they are not held responsible for solutions (medical and enlightenment models).

Brickman et al maintain that the compensatory model is the only one that both justifies the act of helping (since recipients are not responsible for their problems) but still leaves recipients with an active sense of control and power over their lives. It also leaves room for feelings of competence and self-esteem for the helpers.

The following are examples of programmes that fit into the enlightenment or medical models:

1. A laboratory approach to parent involvement and education using state-funded adult education programmes at Seattle Community College (Charnley & Myers, 1977). Weekly 2-hour sessions are divided into 5 activity periods providing opportunities for group interaction, presentations by staff members and activities with babies. The summary suggests an attitude of treating parents as people who need to be "taught" and "programmed" into becoming better parents.

2. Kent State University's Parent-Infant-Toddler Programme (Gullo et al, 1987). Again weekly 2-hour sessions are provided over 10 weeks and divided into 40-minute periods employing four 'interact strategies' called:

   Informal Parent-Child Interaction
   Directed Parent-Child Interaction
   Child-Child Interaction
   Focused Interaction among Parents and Professional Staff.

3. Parenting Groups (Wandersman, L & Wandersman, A 1980) which set out to empirically study the role of different kinds of social support in the transition to parenthood from a medical perspective.

Examples of programmes or interventions that fit into the compensatory or moral models are:

1. Family Resource Programmes (Linda Lipton, 1983). These have the goal of providing families with access to formation and support, building on family strengths and community support. Operating as an information clearing house is seen as important.

2. Child & Family Neighbourhood Programmes (Powell, [1979]) in which the family is viewed as an open, adaptive system whose exchanges with the environment a) provide emotional and material support for the family's childrearing functions and b) socialize the family into

certain childrearing beliefs and practices. The major aim is to improve the ways families utilize social networks and neighbourhood resources to support child-rearing functions. Pertinent institutions and agencies are talked with and attempts are made to change e.g. rigid appointment schedules as well as participants being strengthened in strategies for talking with health personnel to improve utilization of medical services. Stores and hospitals are visited to foster knowledge and skills necessary for making use of formal and informal resources.

3. Family Matters Programmes (Cochran & Woolever, 1983) in Syracuse which explored a two-pronged approach with 150 families with 3-year-old children in 12 different urban and suburban neighbourhoods. Individual home visiting and group strategies were meant to be kept separate but in the end were both used to meet personal needs.

Issues 2-6 about aims, relationships, diversity, accountability, view of parents and evaluation are basically all about whether the intervention or programme is to do things TO parents or WITH parents. On the one hand "off the shelf" models can be used to give something seen as lacking to parents. On the other hand respectful intervention using processes likely to democratize knowledge and power through and with families and communities is possible.

ISSUE 2 AIMS OF INTERVENTION - BY CONTENT OR CONTINUUM

A curriculum and a somewhat simplistic content orientation in which certain information and training is meant to be imparted to parents (often called parent education).

Cochran & Woolever (1983) say they are consciously and actively engaged in an attempt to counter the deficit perspective "which is one of the basic tenets of service provision in the United States".

A process orientation in which multiple differing needs along a continuum can be met. Florin and Dokecki (1983) have suggested this be called Parent & Family Education and see it as facilitating parents in their role as family managers and supporting their personal needs as adults. Parents are acknowledged as co-ordinators of all types of services and experiences for their children, and helping them become more successful in negotiating transactions with society's institutions is seen as important.

ISSUE 3 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DELIVERER AND RECIPIENT

An expert or professional delivers services to passive recipients.	**A more collaborative relationship with a partnership the goal in needs assessment and service delivery.**
The expert's views or models of child rearing may not be compatible with the parents' models of child rearing.	**Professionals serve as resources for families who define their own needs and play an active role in a process of self development.**

ISSUE 4 RECIPE OR DIVERSITY IN SERVICE DELIVERY

Use of terms such as "curriculum, integrity of the model, parent education, parent-training, assist parents to become better parents, prevent, assure, classes, activity periods" - suggest very little parent power or choice over intervention input or outcomes.	**Parents are seen as part of community. Communities are seen as diverse in their make-up and institutions and organizations as operating differently in different communities.**
Minimum or expected attendance levels and involvement in specific activities plus offer a certain duration of participation. These expectations suggest that all participants have similar needs (e.g. similar support systems external to the programme) and similar requisite skills for involvement. Such parameters can also set staff expectations about the ideal form of participation (e.g. low attendance is bad and high attendance is good Powell, 1983).	**Can be seen as strengthening and supportive of all families.** **Community-compatible programmes might be addressed through communities being asked to take responsibility for support and nurturance of their resident families.**

ISSUE 5 WHO IS ACCOUNTABLE TO WHOM

Weiss (1988) says it is as yet unclear whether, and how, programmes reach and serve the high-risk children and families in their communities.

She says that one of the issues that frequently emerges is the need to vary the content and intensity of the programme to reach and serve such families. In some instances this is difficult because the high demand for services from the middle class can limit the financial and other resources available for more intensive services for high-risk families.

Dokecki et al (1979) suggest that real accountability must be to the recipients. Adults (like children) relate to programmes and environment according to their past and present life circumstances and concepts so the intervention has to work in ways that acknowledge the parent not the staff as the primary organizer of the intervention.

ISSUE 6 VIEW OF PARENTS/RECIPIENTS

A deficit model of parents and education and a behaviour modification model of child rearing which can be alien to parents - particularly those who belong to ethnic minorities.

Respect for competence of adults. Recognition of the knowlege parents have of their own children and situations.

ISSUE 7 WHAT & HOW TO EVALUATE

The effect on children? Parents? The community? Urban versus rural interventions? Effects with e.g., Maori? Pacific Island? Pakeha? Families? Participation in programmes as a continuum or set of continua or as a static nominal variable?

Powell (1983) suggests that the process of participation (e.g. relations with others) may prove to be a more useful focus of examination than structural terms of participation (e.g. attendance). To what extent do staff or helpers or intervenors influence or encourage parents to take on certain patterns of involvement? Are diverse patterns of participation enabled? Gray & Wandersman (1980) say that the traditional, experimental analysis of variance, pre/post test design, is too restrictive and the researcher should examine the factors that facilitate the development of competence in

the ecological context.

I would now like to consider the developments in America during the 1980s and the work of the Bernard van Leer Foundation.

Connecticut has Parent Education and Support Centres (since 1986) with priority given to the underserved, including teen and single parents, low-income parents, two-worker families, parents with limited English proficiency. Each centre has to provide parent education and parent training services; parent support services (groups drop-in programmes, parent-child activities); information and co-ordination services and technical assistance, consultation and training services for other community agencies.

Maryland has 8 Family Support Centres (since 1986) focused on teen parents. The goals are to (1) prevent unwanted pregnancies among adolescents (2) assist adolescent parents become better parents (3) assure the health, growth and development of children of adolescent parents (4) help adolescent parents remain in the mainstream by completing school and preparing for employment.

Minnesota has had Early Childhood Family Education (since 1975) which offers parent education group discussions, home visits for some, developmental activities for children and access to toys and books, newsletters and special services for particular populations (immigrants, single parents etc.). The most common form of programming is a weekly class for children held simultaneously with a parent class.

Missouri has Parents as Teachers (since 1981) for anyone with children 0-3. Information and educational guidance are provided mainly in group meetings to enhance the child's physical, social and intellectual development. A need is being expressed for new dimensions in the curriculum, training and service delivery to meet the challenge of serving families of all types and configurations, while maintaining the integrity of the model. It now has a Parents as Teachers model operating in 8 distincly different childcare settings.

Kentucky has had Parent & Child Education (PACE) (since 1986) which reaches 700 parents and children at a cost of approximately $800 US each in the context of an adult literacy programme. Eligibility is restricted to parents who do not have a high school diploma or a high school equivalency certificate with 3- and 4-year-old children.

Arkansas imported The Home Instruction Programme for Pre-school Youngsters (HIPPY) from Israel in 1986 and now has approximately 19 sites serving around 2000 children and their parents. It was designed in Israel in 1969 to improve the educational chances of the children of poor, largely illiterate immigrants. The programme's primary focus is the training of 4- and 5-year-olds for a successful school

experience through home instruction every other week for 30 weeks of the year. The highly structured curriculum precludes parent input into the programme design.

Iowa has the Family Development Demonstration Grant (since 1988) designed to combine family support and education with long-term employment services to families considered at risk of long-term welfare dependency or family crises that might lead to foster placement. At least 7 programmes have been established.

Oregon started a State Early Childhood Initiatives Project in 1986 combining an expansion of Head Start and Together for Children which also focuses on parents of young children who were at risk of later school failure. In the 1988-89 academic year there were 3 Together For Children Sites (which do not overlap with 11 sites funded under pre-kindergarten grants) catering for 145 parents, 110 families and 300 parents and 320 chilren, respectively. All 3 sites offer parenting classes and other services offered by one or more sites include: workshops, support groups, teen-parent classes, resource centres, phone call-in lines, parent/child playgroups, information and referral. Children are considered at risk if their parents or families are single parents, step-parents, teen-parents, low-income families, dual career families, migrant families and families in which English is a second language.

Vermont has Parent-Child Centres (since 1987) - now numbering over 13 with parent education, designed to educate individuals about parenting skills, following a specific curriculum; parent support groups and playgroups for parents and children. The primary focus of services for children is developmental childcare, including before and after school programmes, infant care and summer camps.

Washington has an Even Start Programme (since 1987) to remedy the lack of literacy skills among parents whose children have trouble learning. It is a companion to Washington's 1986 Early Childhood Education & Assistance Programme which is based on the Head Start model and serves 4-year-olds from families that are at or below the poverty level. There are at least 17 Even Start programmes offering literacy training, childcare and transport assistance. In 1989, very few truly illiterate parents had enrolled in the programme.

In Paths to Empowerment (1990) Ruth Paz says that the 10 years' work in Israel supported by the Bernard van Leer Foundation illustrate that inflexible models are not about community education. The elements she says are predicators of success are: knowledge shared, training, the experience of self-initiated activity and of self-management; awareness of the benefits of mutual aid and co-operation. Beyond that it is up to the community itself and the people who live in it to carry matters forward.

She points out that all of this is not to say that community-based education is the easy route. To struggle to understand people's real needs - and even more so, to help them become aware of their own needs; to convince them that it is within their capacity and power to change their life situations and those of their children; to disabuse them of their expectations of magic solutions and immediate results and convince them of the need to move step by step; to resist the temptation to do things for people, rather than helping them to help themselves: none of these are easy processes. Far simpler, and certainly far less trying, is to intervene with pre-packaged, standardized programmes: 'one size fits all'. The question posed is, how well can one garment be made to fit all - and how well will it wear? The Bernard van Leer Foundation is increasingly taking the view that lasting change cannot be superimposed, but must come from within the individual and the community and that the only change that is inevitably superimposed is destructive change.

What other lessons can be learned from Bernard van Leer Projects? That the more one understands the context within which one is working, the better the chances of success. Working with a community calls for knowing that community at both its surface and its subterranean levels: its culture, its taboos and prejudices, its history, its power structure. Further, that there is an in-built contradiction between the belief in self-activation and autonomous functioning, and the process of intervention, posing an unavoidable dilemma which must be honestly confronted. Were the community functioning effectively and independently, there would be no need for intervention; however, the reality is often one of dependence, apathy and fatalism, which must be broken down slowly. In other words, the intervenor must take the initiative. The right balance is needed between waiting passively for something to happen and building up new over-dependence. A measure of humility is said to be a good antidote to the fatal fallacy of playing God with other people's lives.

Hugh Philp (1988) says that the Foundation has moved over the years from:

1. Compensation for deficiencies to development of innate potential as the value or dimension determining the nature of teaching methods, whether in an education institution, in the home or in the community;

2. Intervention to interaction as the social dimension determining relationships with the child and his or her family and social community;

3. A cognitive or intellectual focus of development and interaction to the whole child as the psychological dimension determining the nature of activities; and

4. The institution to the community as the group with which it is most appropriate to work. This may be called broadly the instrumental dimension.

The Foundation's work has been influenced by Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological perspective. Bronfenbrenner's position, as briefly as possible, is as follows. Within the boundaries set by heredity, human growth and development depend on the individual's interaction with their 'ecological environment'. That environment has three separate dimensions all related to one another in a 'nesting' structure, like a set of Russion dolls. At its heart are the 'prime' or immediate settings in which the individual lives most of their life: the home, the early childhood centre, the school, the workplace. The second dimension is the relationship between these prime settings: this relationship is said to be 'as decisive for development as events taking place within a given setting'. Third are the events taking place in settings at which the developing person is not even present but which may impinge upon them. In the case of a young child, for example, their parents' place of employment. Thus, in summary, the individual's 'ecological environment' is made up of 'prime settings', the relationships between these settings, and events taking place in settings which are important to the individual but in which they play no active part.

A final important strand in Bronfenbrenner's argument is his notion that a person's ecological environment is what that individual perceives it to be rather than what the environment 'is' as it is measured by any objective criteria.

The study of human development and therefore, of parent support, thus becomes essentially a study of the influences of: first, how individuals act, react and interact within their own immediate 'prime settings'; second, how they change and are changed by these settings; third, how they are affected by the relationships between these settings and finally how they 'see' their own environment.

It is interesting that Peter Drucker (1989) also talks of seeing as being a valid way of knowing.

Turning back to centre-based early childhood provisions in New Zealand, it is important to note that the Early Childhood Charter Guidelines: A Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices state:

> "All early childhood shall be designed to enhance the development of the child and support the family"

and that every year there should be a plan for the provision of formal and informal parent support and education opportunities and strategies which will support parents in their role.

Anne Meade (1990) talks about travel guides for parents and says:

> "Our goal should be to give all parents a sense of experiencing support and a sense of power. That way Good Beginnings Should Never End".

With the encouragement of early childhood services in New Zealand to see parent support as part of their role, and the parent support that is also happening outside of early childhood centres, this goal certainly appears reachable.

The Early Childhood Development Unit has 36 Parent Support Projects operating from Kaitaia to Bluff, within guidelines that are about working *with* parents and communities in a compensatory model of intervention. The aim is to reach families with young children who are not involved with early childhood services and in 6 months the outcomes include:

* at least 20 public community meetings have discussed local needs;
* health workers closely involved with 8 projects;
* over 400 newsletters, questionnaires, and leaflets distributed to letterboxes and via schools, early childhood services waiting lists and community groups;
* increased attendance at local early childhood services;
* liaison networks with other government agencies established in 11 districts;
* Community Project Support Groups established in 25 communities;
* 100 families being visited in their homes;
* 23 house meetings/discussion groups started;
* 10 ongoing playgroups in homes established;
* 17 sites for playgroups and other early childhood activities found and now used regularly by families;
* in a period of 6 months over 800 families not involved in early childhood services have been reached.

It is clear from international experience that State intervention programmes can be destructive in their effects rather than positive, unless parental assistance and participation and power are actively sought and encouraged. The paradox emerges, as has been found in many studies and in much of the van Leer Foundation's work, that when parents do become involved in positive ways the emphasis shifts from intervention to interaction and from compensation to development. When this occurs the institutions also tend to change, just as families change in the ways in which they operate in relation to institutions and in dealing with their own children.

"Policy can and should be used to support families and intervention could be used in place of policy, but not to mold families or the services they receive according to one mode. Rather, the government's role should be to ensure that child and family life is sustained according to a basic standard,

regardless of family structure. Policies when developed or revitalized, must be predicated on the best knowledge available". (Zigler, Kagan & Klugman Eds. 1983).

There is a lot of knowledge and experience available. A 4-year-old girl was once asked if it was better to travel by boat or by plane. Her reply was "If you are travelling by water it is better to travel by boat and if you are travelling by air it is better to travel by plane."

New Zealand is travelling well with its early childhood services and parent support. I hope you are all able to participate in any decisions about whether to travel by boat or by plane in the future.

Note: This paper resulted from work done for a Bibliography for the Master of Educational Policy at Victoria University.

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PARENTS AS TEACHERS: VALIDATED OR EVALUATED?

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Paper presented at the New Zealand Council for Educational Research Seminar 'Parents as Partners: Parents as Educators'. Wellington, March 1991.

Phrases such as 'parents as first teachers' carry important meanings. When we use them do we mean that children's early learning and development come from being taught? This is not a straightforward claim. Many developmental theorists would not share this view of how children develop. I, too, would see parents as children's first teachers, although not the only ones that are on the scene very early before "professional" educators.

For the moment I want to assume that it is possible to see parents having a direct role in development. I will return to the theoretical underpinnings of this claim later. However, it is interesting at this point to ask how widely this description can be applied and what we might be committing ourselves to by describing parents in this way.

What I would like to discuss is the sort of teachers we think parents are. Among other things, when I call someone a teacher I have in mind that they have beliefs, ideas, and values about what children ought to learn and how they ought to learn them. This certainly applies to parents. Similarly, if we call someone a teacher, we assume that they have some responsibility in the process of learning. If this applies to parents too, it leads us to ask such questions as which ones are relatively good, and which ones are not so good?

These sorts of questions follow directly from calling parents teachers. The *National Party Policy on Education* (Smith, 1990) says that its "First five years" policy

> "...will assist and support parents in their natural role as their child's first teachers: enabling them to better foster their child's development, health and well-being" (p. 3).

When it comes to language, literacy, and numeracy, judgements are often overt and explicit. Examples can be found in very contemporary writings on emergent literacy from researchers who come from quite different theoretical traditions. In Goodman's (1990) recent book, authors refer to middle-class homes providing "rich literacy environments". Mason and Allen (1986) talk of non-mainstream homes where "the lack of parent

supported story activities in the preschool years is likely to be one source accounting for the difficulty that working-class children exhibit in later grades in reading comprehension" (pp. 28-29).

One reason for these judgements is that these skills are the stuff of schooling. Language and literacy are both processes and deliberate products of schooling. It then matters what sorts of expertise children have when they come to school, and how families complement what schools might be teaching. The quote from Goodman's book suggests that some parents are inadequate, they fail to adequately teach their children. They are not good "first teachers". Is this what we want to say? In the rest of this paper I want to take the example of literacy development before school, concentrating on reading books to preschoolers. What do differences between parents mean about how good they are as teachers?

LITERACY BEFORE SCHOOL AND THE TRANSITION TO SCHOOL

We can be reasonably sure that reading story books to children before school influences children's performance at school. The effects can be detected quite early on in their school career. There are studies from both the United States and England which provide details and we have been carrying out research here in Aotearoa/New Zealand too. The results of these studies can be used to examine our views of parents as teachers.

Study One

In an initial study Gwenneth Phillips and I described a group of families who were obviously (and selected as such) keen book readers (Phillips and McNaughton, 1990). The 10 families were middle-class and most were pakeha. What they did in the activity of book reading to their 3- and 4-year olds was quite clearly a systematic, well practised social event with very easily identifiable agendas. For example, they read books of narrative fiction almost exclusively, and to us as observers almost exhaustively; on average 87 books in 28 days. Of these 95% were story books (i.e., with a narrative structure). Of the many exchanges that took place between the adult reader and child when reading, 86% of them (from either the child or the adult) revealed an agenda to do with making sense of the narrative. We described these as narrative routines (some typical examples from the next study are shown in Figure One).

Study Two

Recently, Tania Kaai and I described a group of Maori, Samoan, and pakeha families (McNaughton & Kaai, 1990). All of the caregivers had non-professional occupations and had completed few years of secondary schooling. They had children who became high progress readers and writers at school. They too show the textual "commitment" of pakeha middle-class families

we had described in the earlier study. They read books to their children several times a week.

But they also showed a "textual dexterity". When reading books, caregivers (including siblings and "extended" family members) not only constructed narrative meanings in joint dialogue with the preschooler; they also chose to read a range of other books including expository texts, nursery rhymes, beginning reading books brought home by family members, and church texts. "Narrative" routines associated with story books consistently shifted to different sorts of routines when reading the latter texts. They often used performance routines where the "expert" modelled a phrase or sentence, or read most of the sentence. The novice's job was to imitate or complete the sentence. I would argue that the processes and "agendas" of these activities carry important learning about the nature of written language, its purposes and meanings. For example, the performance and agreement routines carry messages about when and what meanings in texts are negotiable and how learning to decode should take place. Examples of these different routines are shown in Figure One (see McNaughton & Kaai, 1990).

Figure 1

The Use of Different Routines with Different Books

Family Ho	Reading storybook Crunch the Crocodile Narrative routine
Mother:	How they hated that sound..." [INSERTION] look at his eyes. They're getting bigger and bigger aren't they?/
Child:	Yeah
Mother:	I think they're all going to chase him...
	Reading nursery rhyme book (I Know an Old Lady)
	Performance routine/gap filling
Mother:	she swallowed the cat to catch the (rising intonation plus pause)
Child:	spider
Mother:	bird
Child:	bird
Family Be	Reading a church text Sabbath School
	Agreement routine
Father:	"Is mummy happy when I obey? Oh yes... Is dad happy when I obey?" [rising intonation plus pause]
Child:	Yeah
	Reading an animal book
	Labelling routine
Child:	[INSERTION] What's that?/
Older sibling:	Saw fish. You know why because it's got all little jaws on each side and then they can chop down on things in the water.
Family Ke	Reading storybook Snow White
	Narrative routine
Mother:	"...ordered Snow White to be killed".

[INSERTION] she's not a very nice lady is she?

Child: No. She's the wicked queen.

Reading class text Andrew's Engine (from cousin)
Performance routine - elicited imitation

Mother: "Andrew"

Child: Andrew

Mother: "had"

Child: had

Study Three

In a third, as yet unpublished, study, a Tongan researcher (Wolfgramm, 1991) has been describing book reading in Tongan families. These families also read a lot to their children. When they read, irrespective of the type of text, they adopted a performance routine. The children had learned extensive passages and whole texts. They were able to "read" books, having been taught with these demonstrably powerful routines. Observations of learning from text at Sunday School (learning hymns and bible passages) showed that performance routines were a "preferred" pedagogy. As in the previous study (with the Samoan and Maori families in particular), the strong presence and supportive agency of the church validated and clarified literacy activities.

PARENTS AS TEACHERS: SOME COMMENTS

The (very brief summary of these) studies provide important descriptions of parents as educators. Four descriptions in particular help to clarify what we might mean by calling those of us who parent "teachers", and how our teaching might be seen. I will summarize them and draw some implications.

1. *Parenting is culturally and socially based*

What parents do has meaning and intent although we may not always be aware of these. We have beliefs, hold values, and set goals for what and how we want our children to learn. At one level for literacy in our society there are common cultural elements, such as reading books to children. At another level, clearly, different cultural groups can and do construct different literacy activities. Impressively, in some families their bicultural and multicultural lives are reflected in what I have called their "textual dexterity", expertise in different forms of literacy.

The significance of this conclusion is a matter of validation. How parents socialize their children into literacy activities may be valid and effective for their local context. There may be problems with the extent to which this is recognized and built upon by schools. I will comment more on this shortly.

2. *Parenting is theory laden*

The previous principle says that what parents do has cultural and social significance. Another way of putting this is to say parents work from theories about children and their development and learning. These are not set in concrete. Like culture generally, our theories of children shift depending on a number of factors including the information that is held by experts and agencies.

Figure 2

Conversation Between Mother and Child During Storybook Reading

Mum	Do you want to read the story?
R...	Yeah.
Mum	First, can you show mummy where the front of the book is. Show me where the front of the book is.
R...	Yeah.
Mum	The front. Where's the front?
R...	Here.
Mum	Okay, you turn the page. Where's the back of the book?
R...	Here.
Mum	Where do you start reading? Which side? Which side do you start reading?
R...	This side.
Mum	Which one?
R...	This side.
Mum	That's right. Oh! (pages turning) This is where the story begins. Okay? This is where the story begins. No more cakes. That's the ... that's the name of the story.
R...	The cat's hungry, eh?

We have extremely telling examples of just how open to information parents might be. One such example, shown in Figure Two, comes from the transcript of a book reading sessions from a family in the second study. I wonder if you can spot our unintended influence as researchers with this family. (It can be seen in the adoption of the Concepts about Print probes as instructional exchanges which the mother in this family observed us doing as part of our testing.) This mother had never before (in earlier book reading sessions) asked questions about e.g., where the front of the book was. She had observed us testing her child and using those questions and had adapted the testing procedures for her own purposes.

We as educators have a responsibility to keep supplying information and not controlling access to information. What I am arguing here is that, rather than slipping into the role of blaming parents for being inexpert it is more appropriate to check what information they have and how we have provided it. Even in areas where we are relatively good at providing information to parents we could do better. For example, in the second study we examined how the children read books to their parents after the children went to school. Although our records show these interactions to be relatively effective (the schools were sending very appropriate books home), the families told us that they had no information from school on what they might do. It was apparent that parents had trialled different procedures and were hungry for information. It was

also apparent that the teachers had very little idea about how much or what sort of reading was going on. What emerges from this is the need to communicate in a more effective way with parents if we expect them to be an integral part of the beginning reading programme. This is especially critical with parents who are not familiar with school practices, whose children might be "at risk" (McNaughton, 1991).

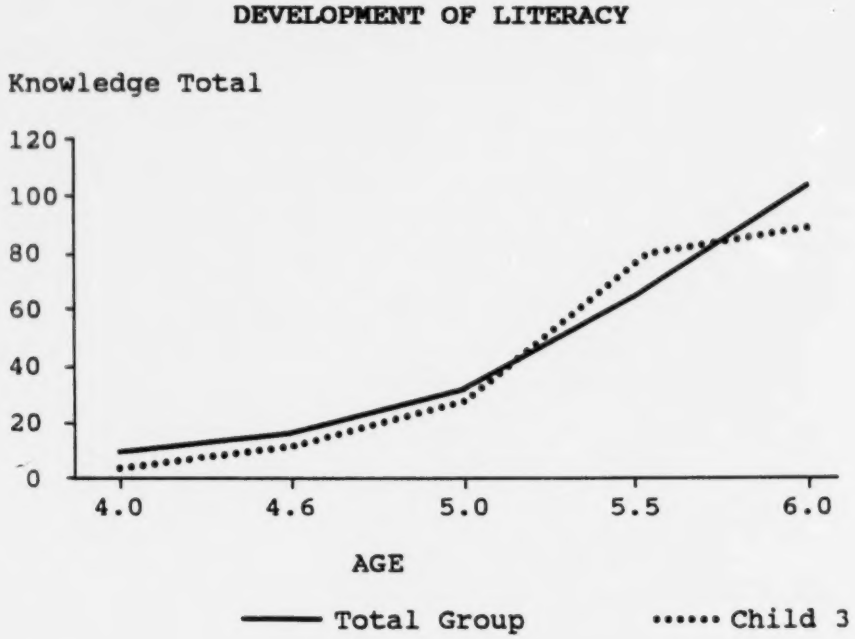
3. *Parenting is situated in political, economic and social environments*

There is a feature of environments which is not well represented in our models. The social setting within which activities occur are mutable and dynamic.

An example of this point comes from our longitudinal study of different families (McNaughton and Kaai, 1990). Figure Three describes limited aspects of 16 children's literacy knowledge (based on the Clay, 1979 diagnostic survey). On entry to school these children could recognize about 8 "concepts about print", they could identify about 15 letters on the letter identification test, and they could write one or two words by themselves.

Figure 3

The Development of Literacy knowledge in a "problem" reader



One of the three children, who against expectations was not high progress at 6;0 years, is also shown on the graph. This pakeha girl was slightly above the group until the second half of her first year at school. Before starting school she and her family shared similar characteristics to others including textual commitments such as reading books before school and familiar relationships with the school. But two major events took place half way through the year. Her mother and father separated and she and her sister went to live with their mother. As a consequence, she changed home and school. From this time there was a problem in the relationship with school.

At 5;6 years her mother said she had been too busy to do some of the things she ordinarily did such as reading stories with M.... At 6;0 years M... was reported to be happy although lacking in confidence at the new school. She did not take her reading books home. Both the teacher and her mother knew this but neither was in contact with the other and did not know exactly what was happening in the other setting.

A model of environment is needed which can represent the developing and mutable nature of children's ecologies (see also Bronfenbrenner, 1986; McNaughton, 1987). Critical components for schooling concern the relationships between settings. The other two children (a Maori and a Samoan), who did not make high progress, illustrate this too. The lack of shared familiarity between settings (in one instance due to considerable hardships of difficult accommodation, repeated shifts in accommodation, unemployment, lack of transport, distance from the school, and perceived rejection from a local school) was a feature of their relationship with the school.

What this means is that helping parents to be better educators entails social interventions to create better and more supportive learning conditions for families. It seems to me to be the height of arrogance to blame parents for less than optimal parenting when the conditions may be less than optimal. Literacy policies are reliant on social policies, including those of social welfare.

It is interesting to note that in our study of high-progress children the families had very supportive circumstances. Church and local agencies including childcare, preschools, and clubs provided support and validated their parenting.

What I have said here is not meant to be an argument for parents (e.g. mothers) to not work outside of the home. It is an argument for recognizing skills and the conditions which support those skills in local contexts. Agencies which support have cultural and social significance.

4. *A general theoretical point: development is constructed in various ways*

Parents expend considerable time and energy constructing children's developments. This is very obvious in emergent

literacy. The notion of active construction of development, however, should not be confused with direct teaching. Our teaching is often indirect, incidental, and embedded in other activities.

Why might this be important to emphasize here? When we talk about helping parents to be better educators are we failing to recognize what they already do? Whatever our policies do they must not invalidate or underestimate what parents do in fact do.

As I said at the beginning of this talk, I too would see parents as educators. This represents a significant shift in our views about the role of significant "others" in children's lives. But this is not meant to imply that the only or best delivery of education is via direct teaching. Rather, what is being argued is that the incidental and "embedded" forces of influence that happen outside of school are extremely significant forms of education.

SOME EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

Each of these descriptions carries educational implications particularly for the relationships between development at home and the transition to school. There are two general teaching principles that are worth restating here. The first is that in order to teach most effectively one should teach from the strengths of the learner (their knowledge and ways of learning). In current parlance, this means attempting to find out where the child is "coming from" or to affirm (validate) their history and place. The second is that the developmental potential of a setting (home or school) is enhanced to the degree that they are "in tune" (Bronfenbrenner, 1976).

Putting these two principles together with the earlier descriptions of parenting, we are led to some important conclusions about how best to make the transition to preschools and schools powerful and effective for all children. It is not possible to elaborate them here. But they have to do with issues of how well matched settings are and how prepared preschool and school environments are to see the strengths (and not only evaluate the weaknesses) of children and their socializations (see McNaughton, 1991).

This allows me to make a brief comment on the question of comparing parents. Are parents necessarily good and bad when it comes to preparing children for school? Comparisons between cultural groups may confuse cultural expertise defined by one group with the cultural expertise of another. In literacy it certainly appears that some sorts of parenting (often by anglo middle-class parents) is associated with success in learning to read at school. But my argument here has been that this does not mean that other parents are deficient. If effectiveness can be evaluated, it must be done

in context, and with the knowledge of how much contact/connection schools have achieved with their community.

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THE PARENT SUPPORT AND EDUCATION PROJECT

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The Parent Support and Education Project was piloted by the early childhood section of the old Department of Education. Pilot schemes were established in Hamilton, Taranaki and Invercargill.

The overall aim of the schemes was to reach parents not currently linked to any organization and to provide those parents with:

* a listening ear
* information about local support and education services and activities
* encouragement to use these services if desired
* practical help in extending parenting skills
* friendly support in coping with the demands of a young family
* extra or specialized attention for young children
* opportunities to meet other parents with young children
* practical help in developing services and resources to suit local needs.

Objectives included drawing on, and contributing to, community resources by local consultation to identify local needs and action, assisting community-based parent support and education networks, encouraging networks among agencies, as well as developing self-esteem and self-confidence in parents.

The principles of delivery were based on accepting families as they were without judgement, encouraging personal responsibility, recognizing parents as experts on their children, reinforcing and encouraging parent-child activities, and promoting exchange of resources among neighbouring families.

As the researcher I was asked to focus on:

1. the consultative processes used to start and maintain each project;
2. the processes developed to reach target parents;
3. the effectiveness of the processes in reaching target parents;
4. how parents' needs were identified, what needs were expressed and how they were met;
5. the outcomes for the target parents, Department of Education staff, other professionals and community leaders and workers;
6. the effectiveness of the consultative and contact processes as models for future programmes.

My primary focus was on the Nawton project with ongoing monitoring of the projects in Invercargill, Opunake and Waitara.

The research methods used in Nawton were based on observation of meetings, reports of supervision sessions and semi-structured interviews with Department of Education staff, advisory committee members, parent support people and the participants themselves.

In the other areas, workers' daily diaries were analyzed and staff of the Education Department interviewed. Parents involved in the projects were spoken with on three projects and another group sent notes from a joint meeting led by the parent support worker.

All the projects tended to follow three distinct phases: consultation, establishment and implementation.

Consultation

Consultation took place on two levels; with community leaders and professionals and/or with the parents themselves. Two of the projects were initiated with public meetings which attracted professionals and leaders of community groups. These public meetings at first generated some uncertainty as people were confused about what the options might be. After a few meetings those attending became advisory groups and provided ongoing support and evaluation. In another project a small group of professionals such as Maori Affairs and Public Health nurses were consulted about the need and asked for potential workers.

In one of the projects the Education Officer preferred to 'work quietly' and the worker began by door knocking to identify interested parents. These parents were then invited to a meeting. In this project there had already been considerable opinion by professionals especially health and education about the needs of the area.

Establishment

The projects which incorporated community consultation and involvement took longer to become established but were valuable in meeting a community education and networking function as well as ensuring that others working in the community were aware of what was happening.

Implementation

Four models of parent support evolved in the project;

1. a home visitor who visited parents in their own homes.

2. parent group organizer who organized the weekly play group and parents' sessions.

3. key residents who were trained to be support people.

4. Providing resources for the community such as a course for people who support parents, establishing a toy library in the local library and, developing community service directory.

HOME VISITING

The home-visiting model was employed in the Taranaki projects. These workers began by systematic doorknocking on families, targeting those who were known not to attend a pre-school, although in some streets the workers chose to visit everybody rather than be seen to visit only some.

The home visitor visited the families at home approximately once a fortnight and took play equipment and books which were exchanged at each visit. The exchange of equipment was seen as offering an excuse to return. Often the visitor accessed the parent by playing with the children and the parent looked on, at first anxious about the child's behaviour and later taking pride in their achievements and development. Some of the mothers were reluctant about their children painting because of the mess but most allowed it if the worker was present. Some allowed their children to paint at other times, particularly on wet days. Some of the families collected natural materials and their 'junk' for the children to play with.

Parents made positive comments about their children's improvements in speed and confidence, their ability to discover things for themselves and keeping themselves occupied.

Where there was interest the mothers joined together in small playgroups. Most of those being home visited preferred the personal visits with some going on to a pre-school service. Attempts to get neighbours to meet together had mixed success.

The parents spoke positively about the gains for their children. They also appreciated someone to listen to them and felt cared about.

NEIGHBOURHOOD GROUP

This group developed in a slightly cut-off suburb which had no pre-school service, the nearest kindergarten and playcentre being two and three kilometres away.

The employed worker began by knocking on doors to find out what people were interested in and met with lukewarm interest.

The parents were then invited to a meeting to discuss their needs. The parents elected to have a weekly playgroup with speakers or activities for the parents at every second session. These mothers were clear that they wanted time to meet with other women but not to talk only about things like illnesses and labours.

The parent support worker's role was to organize the playgroup and to arrange the speakers, as well as to be available to support parents.

Most of the parents in the group had their children on kindergarten waiting lists although they were reliant on their own transport to attend. Most of the mothers did not know their neighbours before they attended the group.

These mothers attended a four-session self-esteem course in the evening and asked for a self-defence course which did not attract sufficient enrolments.

Since the playgroups many of the mothers visited each other between sessions and helped each other out.

In this particular project the terms of leasing the building specified that the worker was to be present which had inhibited the progressive passing of responsibility to parents.

The parents themselves thought that the next step would be to try to contact those parents who were not yet involved in the project to see if they wanted to start another group.

NEIGHBOURHOOD WORKERS

In Nawton the concept developed of using key residents to contact parents in their immediate neighbourhoods to find out what they wanted. The Advisory Group identified potential workers who were invited to hear about the project, were provided with pre-service training and employed for four and a half hours a week.

A key element of this project was the pre-service training provided. The sessions covered such matters as communications, boundary setting, cultural awareness and community agencies.

The role of the parent support workers was to:

* identify parents in need of support
* befriend parents in a specific area
* provide a place to meet
* gather parents together
* encourage a sense of group belonging
* encourage self-esteem and confidence

* facilitate the group to identify learning needs, crafts and parent education
* have a knowledge of resources, people and organizations
* liaise with the co-ordinator in arranging sessions.

Most workers chose to invite everybody in their street sometimes even those without pre-school children. Those who worked in pairs found doorknocking easier than those on their own. They felt that publicity about the project would have made doorknocking easier.

After doorknocking and holding meetings with the parents, most neighbourhoods formed groups offering combinations of speakers, craft activities, coffee mornings and playgroups. Two of the workers visited the parents individually rather than form a group.

In addition to operating parent and playgroups the workers found that parents contacted them at home for support and a listening ear and they referred parents to appropriate agencies if this was required.

Once the workers started working with parents they found that attending the training and support meetings as well as their groups was more time consuming than they wanted.

This project had a more complex organizational structure than the others. The parent support workers chose one of their members to be the co-ordinator. She kept in contact with the Early Childhood Officer and represented the needs and interests of the workers at the Advisory Group made up of key professionals in the area. The Advisory Group was a link with the Early Childhood Education Officers providing feedback on the impact of the project and advising and further needs. A supervisor was employed to lead monthly professional support sessions. A small management group to run day-to-day administrative processes was headed by the Early Childhood Education Officer.

PARENTS' NEEDS

The women contacted by the projects ranged from those who were extremely isolated by their shyness and extreme personal circumstances, to those who were active community members but appreciated the opportunity to mix with their neighbours.

The women who represented the target parents were often very isolated from other people in the community, some having no family near, some lacked confidence to join groups, some had a range of needs with personal relationships, children's health, finances and housing. Some of these needs were extreme and required support from the worker to identify processes to work through the problem. One of the parent support workers described identifying one problem at a time and helping the parent to work out the options and make decisions. As one

mother said, "No one's made me think for myself before. You always gave me the choice and then helped me stick to it. I wanted the best for my kids but I just didn't know where to go".

A need for relief from the children and support in occupying them was identified. Many were unaware of services available in the community or did not know how to contact them.

All the mothers wanted the best for their children but some were unsure how to provide for that.

Some of the fathers were reluctant for their wives to be involved in the project. The home visitors were able to discuss the issue directly but it was harder for those working with groups. It was noted that there was little community education for fathers.

OUTCOMES FOR PARENTS

The outcomes for parents in home-visiting models included being linked to other agencies, awareness of ways of keeping children busy at home, promoting children's learning. Some went on to local early childhood services.

Parents in groups established and strengthened neighbourhood friendship and support networks, awareness of community agencies, craft skills.

In the neighbourhood group projects the key residents' personal growth was enhanced, they re-evaluated their career options and continuing education needs. One asked me what you do when a woman's husband thought she's having an affair because she's so happy.

Neighbourhood links were established and strengthened and supportive friendships were developed, awareness of community agencies was raised and parents developed craft skills. Some women used the craft skills to supplement their income.

SUPPORT FOR WORKERS

The issues faced by parents emphasize the need for workers to be trained in listening skills, aware of community resources and services and skilled in group leadership.

Dealing with families with a range of needs can be stressful, and support systems need to be in place so that the workers deal effectively with the families' needs and with their own stress as it arises. Such support seems to be particularly necessary in the establishment phase.

The requirement for workers to be non-judgemental was difficult especially when they encountered involvement in

drugs or family violence. As one of the workers said when dealing with family problems "Sometimes you have to take risks". Analyzing those risks and their possible outcomes is an important component of supervision.

Training

Workers expressed appreciation of communications courses, especially listening skills. Cultural awareness courses were appreciated for the increased sensitivity they brought. Most workers trained to lead Positive Parenting Courses. The range of options provided in the course became a useful resource for the workers when supporting parents.

An important session in the Nawton pre-service training was to establish boundaries in their work so that they were clear about the line between listening and supporting and being a counsellor, were able to say no, not having to be an expert and being a leader not a boss.

Managerial and Professional Support

The Early Childhood Education Officers provided support and someone with whom to talk through processes used, share problems with families and progress towards achieving the objectives. In small communities it was important to have an outsider with whom one could speak confidentially.

The Nawton project contracted a supervisor to provide professional supervision sessions with the group of parent support workers. Workers commented on the value of group support but it also seemed necessary for workers to know the purpose of supervision and how to make use of the sessions as the workers reported that it did not seem necessary after the first few sessions.

Administrative support is also important so that workers are promptly reimbursed for their expenses.

CONCLUSIONS

The pilot schemes identified three possible models in response to the needs of the different communities.

The home-visiting models were very successful in reaching the target parents. The workers were valued by the parents as someone who cared about them and supported them to work through some of their problems. Some of the parents developed enough confidence to join other groups, many were put in touch with other support services, but some may have felt unsupported once the project ceased.

The parent groups tended to attract parents with sufficient confidence to join groups and were successful in attracting both isolated and more active parents although some isolated parents in the community did not become involved. One group had already served the purpose of neighbours knowing each other and wound down before the project was completed. The groups were able to operate independently for a period once the project wound down. One of the Nawton groups is still operating eighteen months later.

Support for the workers responsible for working with parents seemed to be essential. Support for workers came from the Education Officers, community advisory groups, professional supervision, pre-service and in-service training and peer support.

The projects demonstrated that families appreciate support in learning more about parenting and providing for their children's play and learning. Some parents responded readily to the opportunity to join with other parents, others appreciated being visited in their own homes and supported on an individual basis.

It would seem that such projects need to be flexible enough to adapt to the needs of the community and the parents and to evolve in ways that fit the worker and the families.

MAORI WOMEN'S WELFARE LEAGUE

Aroha Reriti-Crofts

The Maori Women's Welfare League has branches throughout eight regions of Aotearoa. The League's study of Maori women's and family health, carried out in 1984, had a 99% response rate. This study arose in response to Matiu Rata's challenge in 1974 for the League to look at Maori health.

The League is moving towards setting up positive parenting programmes throughout the country, targeting "drop-outs" from school. The whanau support for baby care is not always there, so the programmes emphasize the importance of contact with the infant - bringing the baby back to the lap after nappy change, and massage of babies. The League does not believe you can "zap up" parenting skills in 14 weeks. There is a rapport with MACCESS in running the parenting programmes, although MACCESS is rather like a dripping tap - on again, off again. There are four positive parenting courses running in the North Island at Te Atatu, Wellington, Napier and Hastings. Other North Island branches are lined up for positive parenting courses with MACCESS, and there are two in the South Island run through ACCESS.

The wellbeing of women and families is a top priority of the League. In planning the courses, these three areas are considered:

1. Tikanga Maori is needed in the courses, Maori young people are still missing out;

2. Basic cooking is included (how to avoid cans and make jam and preserves, how to do a boil up, basic kai, and use of microwave);

3. Basic sewing.

Because the child has had the privilege of being conceived by two people, ideally the child should have the privilege of being reared by the same two people. The 14-week course includes anger management and budgeting.

The League has discussed with the Minister a pilot scheme he wants to set up where the hapu mother is to be followed for 3 years. The League's response to this is: "If you want a pilot scheme set up, come to the League directly".

If the seminar organizers and participants want to do research, the League are happy for them to do research.

Maori Women's Welfare League Inc.

The Maori Women's Welfare League arose out of a desire of Maori women throughout Aotearoa for an organization that would give Maori women a place and a voice in New Zealand society, and yet not be exclusively Maori in its membership.

The Social and Economic Advancement Act of 1945 was placed on the Statute Books and the Department of Maori Affairs came into being. The Welfare Division appointed Women Welfare Officers to form Maori Welfare Committees as sister organizations to Maori Tribal Committees.

The first Conference of the Maori Women's Welfare League was held in September 1951 and 187 branches were represented. The prepared constitution was adopted on a note of goodwill co-operation and assistance and the newly formed organization soon emerged as a very important link within Maoridom.

The League was formed with the recognition that the influence of the women in the home is reflected in the members of her household. Maori women had wisdom, courage, fortitude, and an awareness of spiritual and moral values.

Princess Te Puea Herangi of Waikato, a woman of great stature, was the first Patroness. Her grandniece, Te Arikinui Te Atairangikaahu, is the League's present Patroness. Under the inspired leadership of Dame Whina Cooper as foundation Dominion President, and with a clear vision of League needs, this body of women moved out in force with dedication and determination, seeking solutions to post-war difficulties. No task was too small or too big. They raised money to educate and clothe children in need, undertook housing surveys demanding better houses, built roads, revived Maori arts and crafts, visited hospitals and prisons, carried out a general programme of fundamental education. The League challenged Government policies in every area of social need and justice. All through this first decade the women were fully supported by their men. Hon H. Corbett Minister of Maori Affairs summing up the effectiveness of the League in its first decade said "the greatest social advancement of the years was due to the efforts of the Maori Women's Welfare League's inspiration".

The second decade saw the independence of the League and the formation of the New Zealand Maori Council with the men accepting responsibility for land laws, housing, education and general politics. The League was involved in the formation of the Maori Education Foundation. The most outstanding contribution in the sixties was the development of the Playcentre movement and its extension into Australia amongst the Aborigines.

During its third decade, the League faced the challenge of a second migration from country to the city, from the home

tribal lands to adopted tribal areas. The organization was faced with youth alienation in large numbers which demanded a positive personal and group response. The League responded on the basis of Whanaungatanga.

In the 1980s the League has undertaken to partner the Department of Maori Affairs in the promotion and development of the Tu Tangata programmes: Women's Wananga; Youth Wananga; Whanau Wananga; Te Kohanga Reo; Rapu Mahi; and Matua Whangai. The League has provided the community component essential to the success of those projects.

Anxiety over the disparity in health standards between Maori and the rest of the Community has involved the League in the first scientific and technological health survey to be conducted by Maori women themselves. The purpose of the survey is to determine the Maori woman's perception of her own health and the health of her family. From the information gathered, the League is to promote positive action programmes to improve the health of our women and their families, and to improve Maori health to the point where health statistics for New Zealand show no ethnic differences. The Health Report of the survey was released November 1984 at the Ngati Toa Marae.

Georgina Kirby

1985

National President 1983-87
Maori Women's Welfare League

Aims of the League

The principal aims of the League as outlined in the Constitution are:

a) To provide an organization for the purpose of enabling members to play an effective part in the cultural, social and economic development of the community.

b) To render humane service whenever and wherever possible to all mankind.

c) To preserve, revive and maintain the teaching of Maori arts and crafts, the Maori language, and to perpetuate the ethics of Maori culture and tradition.

d) To promote fellowship and understanding between women of all races by becoming better informed about cultures, and to co-operate with other women's organizations, Government departments and local bodies in the furtherance of these aims.

e) To foster an interest in health matters by providing opportunities for discussion with members of health agencies in all phases of the health of Maori and all people and through personal contact with patients at home or in hospital.

f) To encourage parents to take an active part in promoting education of their children through participation in pre-school centres, school committees, parent-teacher associations and any other educational programmes.

g) To take an active and sincere interest in the inmates of penal institutions such as borstals, detention centres and pre-release hostels and to assist in their rehabilitation.

h) To afford opportunities for fuller education and training in all branches of homecraft, mothercraft, handcraft, horticulture and hygiene.

i) To work in close co-operation and harmony with the Department of Maori Affairs, other government departments, the New Zealand Maori Council, Maori committees and other organizations involved in welfare activities.

TE KOHANGA REO TRUST

Iritana Tawhiwhirangi

The Trust members have been negotiating a "training package" which aims at strengthening the KAIAKO (fluent speakers) MATUA (parents) and KAUMATUA (elders) who work with the mokopuna (grandchildren).

This is a Tino Rangatiratanga Whakapakari Training package. The whanau, not only the parents, are responsible for strengthening the language of the mokopuna.

The principle of Tino Rangatiratanga from the Treaty of Waitangi means in terms of the mokopuna, building in the principle of tino rangatiratanga into training and life, strengthening the whanau, hapu, iwi and nation. Dr. Reedy found that the fluent speakers of Maori were aged 55 years and over, and recommended that the fluent speakers needed to be with the mokopuna.

In response to the question, "Where is the Maori language going to get you?" the reply should be "Where are we going to get without it?"

The mokopuna need the kaiako as they move through the primary schools, the secondary schools, and the tertiary institutions and universities. Values are lost in the school system, and the cultural korowai (cloak) is left behind, which resulted in anger among those leaving university e.g. Nga Tamatoa. To fix this situation, the mokopuna need to enter TKR at birth, and to be supported by the kaiako and kaumatua from the iwi, throughout their primary, secondary and tertiary education. Courses for parents are also needed at each level of the mokopuna education because each level brings in different needs (e.g. primary school brings in the Boards of Trustees).

"Kohanga Reo training" is not Kohanga Reo training unless it is delivered through the Trust and Kohanga Reo whanau. TKR training is not essentially geared towards employment. The issue is to strengthen the kaiako and the kaumatua themselves, to support the child. It is not employment focused although for the kaiako employment will be a factor.

The whanau have the right to make their own decisions about training. Here is not one policy that the trustees have come up with themselves; the policies have come from what the people want.

SOME CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON PARENT EDUCATION

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INTRODUCTION

This paper is based on the premise that the manner in which parents care for and rear their children is shaped by the traditional and prevailing patterns of parenting to be found in their culture, and is influenced by social and economic factors beyond families themselves. Consequently there is no single model for parenting, nor even a fixed tradition of what is "ideal", for parenting styles are always in relation to current social conditions. By the same token, the process by which adults become parents and learn parenting tasks is as varied as the individual families concerned, and the cultures in which they live. In these circumstances, it makes little sense to expect a particular model of parent education to be appropriate for all aspects of parental learning, or all parents. Any examination of proposals for parent education must therefore consider both the context for parenting, and the characteristics of participating parents, as well as the educational model explicitly or implicitly embodied in the programme provided.

Even though parent education has a long and varied history (Brim, 1965; Schlossman, 1983) several broad themes could be identified. We may, for example, differentiate between programmes intended to prepare for parenting (by providing courses prenatally or focusing on the first three or so years of children's development); programmes emphasizing behavioural management of children, or providing parents with the skills deemed desirable in controlling inappropriate behaviours; and those which focus on parents' own development. But few programmes are necessarily exclusive in orientation. The New Zealand Playcentre movement, for example, began with the goal of facilitating parents' own development, but for some decades has emphasized all three themes. The New Zealand Parents' Centres are almost the converse of that, beginning with antenatal preparation in the 1970s, and subsequently moving further into other aspects of parent support and programmes dealing with children's development. In the USA, on the other hand, research-based intervention programmes tend to focus on the education of parents during the first few years of their children's life; while commercially-based programmes such as Parent Effectiveness Training (Gordon, 1970) predominantly emphasize management of children. Indeed it may be useful to note that sponsorship of the programme is the factor which most sharply differentiates New Zealand from North American or other programmes of parent education: in this country, most programmes are provided by community-based groups; in North

America, they are funded mainly by research groups or private (profit-making) organizations.

THE GENERAL CONTEXT IN NEW ZEALAND FOR PARENT EDUCATION

Some features of recent calls for parent education are common to countries other than New Zealand. For example one aspect commented on by several writers (such as Schlossman, 1983) is that both historically and politically such calls have implied focusing on "motherhood", with an associated assumption that child rearing is primarily women's responsibility. The PTA movement through the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial foundation in USA signifies (according to Schlossman) the integral relationship between political beliefs and myths, and social practices. Thus demands for parent education are related to assumptions about the social order, and are not simply concerned with making all parents "better" or more competent. If they were, it would be necessary to make adjustments to men's beliefs about families, and perhaps also to their timetables as well as to standard hours and conditions of employment.

An awareness of the social context is particularly necessary for contemporary New Zealand families. During the latter half of the 1980s, this country has experienced the negative effects of changes in world trade and eocnomic practices, resulting in a radical deterioration in its economic position. There has also been a major shift in the political philosophy intended to implement remedial action and manage the consequential social change. The associated restructuring of both state and private commercial activities has led to a different scenario for employment and industrial relations, and a changing conception of social life in what used to be regarded as an egalitarian society.

The magnitude of the changes inevitably has had a major impact on families. It is simplistic, but not necessarily inaccurate, to represent these changes as meaning that families are viewed by the dominant political philosophy as microcosms of the social order. That is, parents' role is to manage their responsibilities productively and efficiently without state support or subsidy. They are to provide added value to their "product", and are seen more as contributors to the social and economic order, rather than recipients of benefits from central government administration. The discontinuation of the "Family Benefit" is only one signal of changes in these respects. The corollary of this view of family policy is that the state's role is managerial rather than interventionist: general social conditions affecting families can be manipulated in the interests of wider society, with any inequitable consequences for families being regarded as an unfortunate reflection of their less productive (that is, less powerful) status in that society.

At first glance it may seem anomalous to find a relatively conservative government advocating a form of intervention in family life, by instituting a proposal for parent education. After all, parent education implies that someone will intervene and attempt to alter the parenting pattern for families in the programme. But parent education can be undertaken for a wide variety of reasons, and with many differing strategies. From an historical perspective, New Zealand has not been alone in providing a major social service (the Plunket Society) which was at one level aimed at a "public good" (the general health of mothers and infants), but at the same time imbued with the values of the dominant sectors of society, and intended to ensure that conformity to the values of work, and law-abiding behavioural patterns (Olssen, 1981). It is thus imperative to examine the notion of parent education carefully.

The National Government in New Zealand has announced that it is committed to instituting a programme which embodies two of the above characteristics: it is to be preparatory (aimed at parents prior to the birth of their first child), and sponsored in two ways: first, as a "pilot" research programme in two metropolitan centres, and subsequently as a fully-funded programme integrated into the delivery of a national education system. It is to be designated as the "Parents as first teachers" project, and is claimed to be "the most significant innovation in New Zealand child development since Truby King founded the Plunket Society" (National Party, 1990). It is based on the "New Parents as Teachers" Project initiated by the Missouri Department of Education. Before reviewing some of the bases for that project, it is necessary to consider some of the broad outcomes of two decades of research and writing into the process of parent education.

SOME GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

Almost ten years separate the publication of the first and second "handbooks on parent education" (Fine, 1980; Fine, 1989). But whereas during the 1970s this was a topic examined by a considerable number of researchers, there has been no increase in empirical studies of the area. It would be interesting to speculate on whether this reflects changing priorities in funding or in academic interests. But whatever the answer, it is clear that there are few universally accepted understandings of what is involved, and how it should best be provided.

One major problem is that we tend to assume that the provision of a parent education programme will in fact lead to an improvement in whatever aspect of parenting is to be addressed by the programme. The fallacy of this belief should be readily apparent when we consider that driver education programmes, together with mandatory testing of all beginners, are still unable to prevent "bad driving" in general and regular fatal accidents which have an impact both on

individuals and the general health system. Despite that, there is a continued belief in the power of a relatively brief educational exposure to innoculate a population against potential disasters. It is therefore instructive to consider the assumptions under which we tend to operate in regard to parent education. These, according to Clarke-Stewart (1983), are that:

1. There is an empirical foundation for parent education in the "basic" literature of child development;

2. We have evaluated parent education programmes and know what the effects of such programmes are;

3. We know what kinds of parent education programmes work best;

4. We understand how parent education programmes work;

5. Parent education is more effective than other kinds of social policy.

When the assumptions are set out in this manner, we recognize that there is in fact very little information regarding items two, three, and four; and that item five (concerning alternatives in family policy) requires much more than psychological study to be evaluated thoroughly. Even the assumption (number one above) that parent educational programmes should be based on studies of child health and development deserves to be analyzed carefully. For, as Hess (1980) emphasizes, we need to consider the model of education implied by the notion that the complex business of parenting can be understood exclusively or even principally from within developmental psychology. He notes that many parent education programmes provide information to parents: but they do more than that, for they also define the role of the provider as "expert", and the underlying message is "when you know what I know, you will get it right". The unexpected outcome, according to Hess, is that as a consequence of parent education, parents may believe that they are less competent.

Published accounts of programmes are relatively sparse. Those which are reported in volumes such as Fine (1980, 1989), Haskins and Adams (1983), and Sigel and Hooper (1983) provide interesting material which assist in considering the process. But they lack both the operational specificity required for implementing a programme, and the evidence of outcome effects expected if others are to be convinced the process is worth investigating and funding. Perhaps this is as it should be, for an educational system cannot be exported to another setting without modification. A parent education programme, which is more closely identified with differing cultural mores than school-based learning achievements tend to be, certainly cannot be assumed to work equivalently in foreign settings. (In passing, it is worth noting that even though Gordon's (1970) Parent Effectiveness Training books are widely

available in New Zealand, there is no system of franchising the parent education programme in this country as there is in North America. Here, the books are available in bookstores: there, when PET courses were instituted, the book was provided as part of the course - for a substantial fee).

Typical of published reports is that from Walker and Johnson (1988), who undertook a two-year programme to educate low-income Mexican-American parents and children until the latter were three years of age. While the study confirms some positive outcomes for both mothers and children, few follow-up effects on standardized measures of intelligence were revealed. These results are eminently comparable to most of the literature reporting long-term outcomes of early intervention educational programmes: positive results are reported for measures of parents' valuing of the project, but traditional psychometric measures yield indeterminate results (see, for example, Lazar, Darlington, et al. 19??).

Despite the lack of adequate data, some tentative observations can be made. The last decade has not produced clear evidence concerning the relationship between what parents do, and outcomes in terms of children's development. In a comprehensive review, Clarke-Stewart (1988) concludes that "there is no simple solution, no easy fix, for understanding, predicting and controlling parents' effects on children's development" (p. 71). Thus the first assumption underlying parent education (that there is a body of knowledge relevant to such programmes) remains tenuous. But there is a difficulty. Clarke-Stewart continues by assuming that a solution will in time be found, that better models of development and better (multivariate) research will generate the answers sought for. There is no suggestion that the fundamental research paradigm itself may be at fault, and that psychological studies are unable to deliver the answer required. Yet contemporary critiques of psychology do force us to reconsider the merits of continuing to believe that a satisfactory answer is just around the corner.

These criticisms are not confined to academics of a particular theoretical orientation. For example Martin (1988) has a powerful comment from the perspective of a teacher of young children in kindergarten (first-year primary) school. She rejects the assumptions that psychometric tests are superior to the carefully accumulated knowledge of regular teachers, and that "outside" assistance for children shown to have "special needs" on the basis of such tests is preferable to regular classroom experience. Her plea is totally consistent with that which can be inferred from writers as diverse as Apple (1990), who comments on the "de-skilling" of teachers; and Hess (1980) in regard to parent education, who asserts that the parent, not the parent educator, must be viewed as the expert on their particular child. The criticism is also made by Sigel, who has published widely in a traditionally psychometric fashion, but who recently has indicated that intervention studies of young children and their families need

to attend to the social context, and to economic factors (1990).

Few studies have seriously endeavoured to regard the role of parent educator as a resource for parents (rather than expert), and to see the process as one of empowerment in order to manage effectively within their own society, rather than achieve the goals laid down by others on the basis of norms. Cochran and Woolever (1983) report one of the few programmes to be based on this principle. Their work is specifically based on the theoretical framework of Bronfenbrenner (1979), concerning the ecology of human development. This model emphasizes a phenomenological approach (that what matters most is how the participants understand the process, and that there is no so-called "objective" approach to understanding the influences on human development). Bronfenbrenner attempts to articulate the extent to which various elements of the ecological environment (from the microsystem of family members to the macrosystem of political and cultural beliefs) influence human development. It is perhaps therefore appropriate to conclude this section of a selective review by referring to an earlier paper by Bronfenbrenner. For in a 1978 review he raises the question of "who needs parent education?", and answers that it is nonparents, or specifically the decision-makers and the general public to whom they are responsible, who most need parent education. In other words, it is more important to attend to the conditions which make it possible for parents and families to function properly, than to endeavour to give information to those carrying out the tasks. Should we expect a different response in 1991?

SOME CONCERNS ABOUT A NEW ZEALAND PROPOSAL

The Parents as First Teachers Project (widely referred to as the "Missouri Project") is a programme providing information and services to first-time parents and their children from the third trimester of pregnancy until the children were three years of age. The primary reason for limiting the programme to this age group was that "by 3 years of age deficits were often clearly present and remedial education (would be) too late" (Vartuli and Winter, 1989, p. 99). It is clear that there is plenty of precedent in the literature of early intervention and parent education for attending to families with young children. But there are risks in establishing a programme so firmly based on the notion of deficits. Even with the best of intentions, those who look for deficits rather than strengths will find them.

Interventions were designed "to provide educational guidance to parents, to make parenting less stressful and more pleasurable, and to help parents become better teachers of their children" (Pfannenstiel, 1985). The major findings were that, in contrast to a comparison group, children of participating parents consistently scored significantly higher

on measures of intelligence, achievement, auditory comprehension, verbal ability, and language ability, and also demonstrated significantly more aspects of positive social development. Parents participating in the project were more likely to have had their child's hearing tested by the age of three years than were parents of comparison children, and were significantly more knowledgeable about child development, the importance of physical stimuli, and about discipline. Other outcomes included preference for the project parents' attitudes about the responsiveness of their school district; and their satisfaction with project services.

Clearly the project in Missouri was intended to be designed on traditionally empirical, psychological lines, in which the expertise lay with the research team. Yet the heart of the outcome measures reported concern not the 580 families recruited into the project, but a sub-sample of 75 from the project, whose test scores were compared with another sample of 75 "from the same communities". The lack of random assignment into groups destroys one of the key features in the design of such investigations, for alternative designs could have been considered in order to produce fair evidence of the value of the project. One wonders if this failure (according to the accepted practices of the traditional psychometric audience likely to read the report) is a reason why no databased report of the project appears to have been published in the international literature. At the very least, there are reasons for some misgivings about the value of the project.

The responsibility for developing the New Zealand version of this project lies with Dunedin's longitudinal Health and Development Study. While this project has many facets, it has been funded to a large extent from medical research sources, and has generated studies of a cohort of children from ages three to eighteen years in areas ranging from dental health to physical development, and to social issues such as adolescent smoking. It is demonstrably committed to traditional, psychologically-oriented, surveybased data gathering using nomothetic outcome measures. Variables such as the socio-economic status of the parents, and the standardized "IQ" of the subjects, are typical of those on which its reports are based, and from which predictions for preventive programmes developed. In view of the significance of context alluded to above, it is noteworthy that the Study has typically accumulated its child and parent data on the basis of testing of subjects within the building housing the project, raising serious doubts about the ecological validity of the information (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), especially with its reports of pre-school aged children.

The National Party's election platform acknowledges, in describing the benefits of the proposed scheme, that existing child development and health agencies will be involved, and that existing organizations "which effectively meet the education, health and childcare needs of young New Zealanders" will continue to receive support and funding. That is

certainly not a guarantee that existing agencies will be left as they are at present. And in fact there is an undertaking to review the "heavy demands which Labour's new bureaucracy has placed on the providers of early childhood education". It implies that (given other major thrusts of the National Party's election platform) centralized monitoring of existing agencies will be reduced, and other changes could be contemplated. There is little in such a statement to reassure those concerned for a more ecological perspective on parent education and family support.

IS THERE A BETTER WAY?

After a major review of the available evidence and issues, Haskins and Adams (1983) stated that "the strongest conclusion that seems to be permitted by the evidence is that parent programs are moderately effective in solving the problem. It follows that there is no basis for a major expansion of government support for parent programs" (p. 368-369). Is New Zealand in a better position to make a different judgement? There is no doubt that the paucity of research with which social policy can be evaluated in New Zealand is a major disadvantage to the development of new policies. When there are limited funds available for such research, it is regrettable that such funding as is available is neither contested, nor allocated in response to demonstrated need. Rather, it appears to have been allocated on the basis of political preferences.

But we should not assume that the project being considered is the only study of parent education currently being undertaken in this country. The continued existence of the New Zealand Playcentre movement, the Parents Centres, and the Plunket Society, all comprise different aspects of ongoing action research which deserves to be reported and discussed more fully. The pilot project undertaken by the (previous) Department of Education (Gerritsen, 1990) is a particularly valuable exercise, with the report fully cognisant of the issues concerning parent equity and participation in the evaluation process.

But we also need to acknowledge the limitations of a reliance on empirical studies alone. If what Bronfenbrenner writes is as correct today as it undoubtedly was in 1978, the answers to questions about parent education need to come from within our own culture, and from our own decision-makers. Perhaps, then, it is imperative to begin with a recognition of the value of matuatanga: a respect for parenting, in the context of a society which values and provides adequate support for all parents, under conditions which promote the mutual interdependence of families. When we have yet to attain (or return to) such values and such support, expensive pilot studies based on questionable methodologies are unlikely to reveal new truths.

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HELPING PARENTS TO SUPPORT THEIR CHILDREN'S MATHEMATICAL DEVELOPMENT

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Last year the Early Mathematics Improvement Project (EMI-5s) set out to investigate ways of improving mathematics learning among five-year-olds. Earlier research had shown that even at the new-entrant level, children display substantial variability in levels of mathematical understanding (Young-Loveridge, 1989). Some children start school at a real disadvantage because of their very limited understanding of numbers. The evidence indicates that those children who enter school with poor number skills will tend to remain low achievers unless action is taken (Young-Loveridge, 1990a).

The EMI-5s project focused on two different kinds of intervention - school-based intervention in which children were withdrawn from the classroom in pairs to work with a teacher/researcher using games and books, and home-based intervention in which the children's parents participated in a programme which combined home visiting and workshops with a lending library of games and books. This paper describes only the home-based intervention (for a more detailed account of the overall findings, see Young-Loveridge, 1990b).

Home-based Intervention

Parents were visited at home each week for two weeks then attended weekly workshops for five weeks, followed by a final home visit. During the first home visit, the researcher explained the programme to the parents, and left a book and game for the child to play. During the second home visit, the researcher interviewed the parent/s about the kinds of mathematical activities that occurred at home, their views about mathematics and their own school experiences with mathematics. The book and game were swapped during this visit also. The parent workshops were offered at several different times including the evening and during the school day. Each workshop had no more than about six parents attending at a time, and refreshments were provided to help make participants feel welcome. Childcare was provided for those parents who brought preschoolers with them. The first workshop focused on number in the everyday world and was aimed at raising parents' awareness of the many places in which numbers appear and the difference between the use of numbers to identify things (e.g. phone numbers) and the use of numbers to refer to quantity (e.g., numbers in recipes). The second workshop focused on the use of numbers to do things at home and the difference between counting discrete objects (i.e., "things") and measuring continuous quantity (i.e. "stuff"). The third workshop gave parents the opportunity to play some of the games themselves and to gain some understanding of the kinds

of mathematical processes which children use when playing the games. In workshops four and five, materials were provided so that parents could make their own copies of some of the games that were on loan. During the final home visit, parents were asked to elaborate on their earlier evaluations of each of the games and books their children had used and to reflect on the value of the workshops for them and their children.

The Effect of the Intervention

The children in the home-based intervention made significantly greater gains on the post-test than did a comparable group of their peers who did not participate in the programme (16.4 score points compared to 11.5). Although the magnitude of the difference in gains was relatively modest (the gains for children in the school-based programme were 29.4 compared to 14.8 for a comparable group of their peers), the home-based intervention programme provided some important experiences for parents. Some parents reported that they were now interacting with their children in a different way since coming to the workshops. For example, one mother responded in the following way to a question about whether she had learnt anything herself from coming to the workshops:

> Oh, yes. I think it's got me a lot more involved with A too. We've actually been doing quite a lot together, reading and playing games. It's given me a better understanding of her. Her and I are communicating a lot more now.

Other parents made similar comments.

> Well, it's certainly made me more aware of what I as a parent I have to do to make C more aware. You know, I had to become aware myself before I could hand it down to her, awareness of numbers and different things.
>
> It made us aware that there are numbers out there that we take for granted. You go ahead and do things without being aware that we've seen numbers and we are doing things by numbers. It made us aware that these children are seeing the same things but it's not being pointed out to them.
>
> I thought they (the workshops) were good because I got a lot from it. Even I didn't realize how many times numbers, during the day, you know, I look at them quite often on the clock and on the speedo of the car and things and don't realise that. Yeah.

However, not all of the parents were as enthusiastic about coming to the workshops. A few parents seemed reluctant to come to workshops but were very appreciative of the opportunity to borrow the games and books during the home visits. This finding highlights the need to offer a variety

of different options for parents to become involved in their children's learning. No single approach is likely to suit everyone. Although the social aspect of the workshops may have put some parents off, it was an added bonus for others. The third workshop, which involved playing some of the games, was particularly enjoyable for several of the mothers who commented that they hadn't had so much fun for years.

It is interesting to consider why the gains for children in the home-based programme were less than for those in the school-based programme. The interviews with parents, as well as the attendance at workshops revealed a wide range of commitment to the programme by parents. Some parents attended few of the workshops and hence did not get as many opportunities to exchange their games and books. Other parents, although they attended workshops regularly, reported that they gave the responsibility for reading the books and playing the games with the five-year-old to older children in the family rather than doing it themselves. In order to take account of differing levels of parental commitment to the programme, parents in the home-based programme were categorized as low, medium or high in commitment, based on their participation in workshops and their comments in the final interview about the value of the programme to them. Children's scores ranged from 11.7 for the group whose parents had a low level of commitment to 20.7 for the group whose parents had a high level of commitment (children whose parents had an average level of commitment scored 16.6, on average). However, the children of parents whose level of commitment to the programme was high, still scored less than the children in the school-based intervention programme. It seems probable that the total amount of time spent playing number games and reading number stories with an adult was higher in the school situation than at home, even for the families with the greatest commitment to the programme. Hence extending the duration of the home-based programme may possibly have increased its impact. This explanation is supported by the preliminary results of follow-up interviews of the children which suggest that the children of parents with a high level of commitment may now be equal or even ahead of the children who participated in the school-based programme.

Although the home-based programme seemed to be effective in supporting and encouraging parents to interact more effectively with their children, total reliance on this kind of intervention could lead to further disadvantage for those children whose families cannot, for one reason or another, participate in a special programme. It is essential that teachers themselves take major responsibility for programmes of this kind and that they work with parents in a joint effort to encourage and support the development of the children in their care.

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Acknowledgements

The study reported here was funded by the Ministry of Education. Equipment was funded by the University of Waikato Research Committee.

LETTER TO THE MINISTERS

It was agreed by the seminar participants that a letter outlining the main issues raised at the seminar should be sent to Hon. Dr. Lockwood Smith, Minister of Education
Hon. John Luxton, Associate Minister for Education.

9 April 1991

Hon. Dr. Lockwood Smith
Minister for Education
Parliament Buildings
Wellington

Dear Dr. Smith:

PARENTS AS PARTNERS, PARENTS AS EDUCATORS SEMINAR

Thank you for your response to our invitation to you to attend our recent seminar, Parents as Partners; Parents as Educators. We were disappointed that you were not able to be present, but appreciate the extreme pressure on your time.

Participants at the seminar, which was very well attended, were well aware of your own emphasis on the complementary roles of parents and teachers in the early experiences of young children. They thought it would be helpful if we drew together the major themes which ran through most of the presentations, because of their relevance to developing successful policy directions. The proceedings from the seminar are currently being prepared for publication. Meanwhile, attached are copies of some of the papers which may be of most interest to you.

MAJOR THEMES

1. *Successful elements in education programmes involving parents*:

* Programmes are flexible and diverse, able to be adapted by local people to suit their own community and the skills of the people who will work in the programme. Any institution involved which is not accepted by the parents it is trying to reach is unlikely to succeed.

Success is unlikely, for example, with programmes aimed at Maori and Pacific Island parents which do not originate from their own organizations, or with programmes aimed at parents on low incomes if they feel 'patronized' by professional/middle class language and structures.

* Programmes promote a supportive partnership between parents and professionals. The goal is to improve the self-esteem and

skills of the parents so that they can go on to choose, use, and be involved in the services which best meet their children's (and their own) educational needs, rather than to become dependent on professional 'help'.

The counter to this is that programmes whose goal is to evaluate parents and their children, treating them as passive clients rather than partners, do not enjoy long term or wide-ranging success.

2. *Parent involvement in early childhood education in New Zealand is already higher than most other countries*

* Parents have been to the forefront in developing early childhood services to suit their children and their family environment, services in which parents themselves play active roles and further their own expertise as parents. Examples are Playcentre, Te Kohanga Reo, the currently burgeoning Pacific Island Language Nests, and the informal playgroups supported by ECDU.

This suggests that existing services already found acceptable by parents could be encouraged to extend their work with parents.

3. *Support exists for further development of ways of working with parents of young children which best suit the unique situation of New Zealand*

* The diversity of our early childhood services and the high level of parent involvement are often admired by knowledgeable visitors to our shores. Participants in the seminar felt that rather than import one model of parent education, and a model which appears to have major drawbacks, more support and willingness to become involved in a major policy thrust in this area would be gained by building on already successful services, and trying a range of options to suit different communities and needs. A diversity of approaches is also recommended by the report of the Working party on Primary Preventative Child Health (March 1991).

One option is to offer seeding and programme grants to early childhood services and community groups with educational and health links, to allow them to develop their own programmes. Built-in evaluation of the programme would be an important component of the grant scheme. This approach is fast gaining popularity in the USA at all levels of education. Another would be to bring those working in early childhood services together to pool ideas and success stories.

The seminar participants were very mindful that Government spending will be constrained. They were anxious that any new initiative be both as cost-effective as possible, and without needing the sacrifice of already acceptable and successful provision for parents of young children.

We would be happy to meet with you should you wish to discuss the points made by the seminar participants.

Yours sincerely,

Val Podmore, Margery Renwick, Cathy Wylie
Families and Early Childhood Group